

Survey of the Bible part 99 Proverbs of Agur and King Lemuel

Up to this point we have moved through the first 5 sections of the Proverbs and ended last week with the sayings of Solomon as edited by the men of King Hezekiah long after the death of Solomon.

The last two sections of Proverbs are a compilation of the sayings of two men: Agur, the son of Jakeh in chapter 30, and the words of King Lemuel in chapter 31, thus ending the Proverbs.

We're going to wrap up Proverbs today with these two final chapters.

Proverbs 30:1 ^{NAU} The words of Agur the son of Jakeh, the oracle. The man declares to Ithiel, to Ithiel and Ucal:

So, who are these people? Well, it appears that Agur, son of Jakeh, only appears here in this passage alone.

And what is interesting is that the name Agur is a derivative of the name Agar which means to collect and so the name suggests "the collector."

Therefore, since there is no other reference to such a person it is possible that the name is a symbolic name of an individual, not unlike the name that is used in the book of Ecclesiastes, the Preacher.

Ecclesiastes 1:1 ^{NAU} The words of the Preacher, the son of David, king in Jerusalem.

And of course, the Preacher, as we'll see next week when we start the book of Ecclesiastes, is none other than Solomon himself.

But we're told in Pro. 30:1 that this Agur is the son of Jakeh which would seem to suggest that Agur is a real person in history who is the son of Jakeh.

But again, there is no other reference anywhere in the bible to a Jakeh. The name Jakeh actually means obedience.

And so, when you put the two names together we have, "the collector, the son of obedience."

Who would that be? Well, again we don't know, but this could very well be a pseudonym for a real person who desires to remain anonymous.

We run into a similar problem with the other two names at the end of verse one, Ithiel and Ucal.

There is an Ithiel in the book of Nehemiah but it would not be this Ithiel in Proverbs. But, again the names are instructive in that Ithiel suggests the phrase, “God with me”, and Ucal taken from the Hebrew *yakow* suggests, “I am strong”, which denotes those boasting of their might and denying God according to Fausset’s Bible Dictionary.

And so, if you put all of these names together it could read, The collector, the son of obedience, to those who have God and to those who deny God.

In other words, these are the collections of words from God as I have obediently given them to both believers and unbelievers.

Some might call this a stretch, but it fits with the context of the wise sayings that are put together by the Holy Spirit to all mankind to consider the words God has for all men regarding their eternal futures and how those futures will be determined by God’s gracious and merciful provision for sin.

So, let’s look at some of these words.

Proverbs 30:1-6 ^{NAU} The words of Agur the son of Jakeh, the oracle. The man declares to Ithiel, to Ithiel and Ucal: ² Surely I am more stupid than any man, And I do not have the understanding of a man. ³ Neither have I learned wisdom, Nor do I have the knowledge of the Holy One. ⁴ Who has ascended into heaven and descended? Who has gathered the wind in His fists? Who has wrapped the waters in His garment? Who has established all the ends of the earth? What is His name or His son's name? Surely you know! ⁵ Every word of God is tested; He is a shield to those who take refuge in Him. ⁶ Do not add to His words Or He will reprove you, and you will be proved a liar.

This is an interesting set of sentences which tell us two specific things about the author of this section and his involvement in God’s word.

Notice first of all that these are the words of Agur which as we saw means collector. This collector identifies himself as a son of Jakeh the oracle.

The word oracle essentially means one who utters. But as we've seen from other ancient writings when put in this kind of context it is one who is depended upon to utter important words that this oracle receives from someone outside of himself.

In in different context and in a different culture we have the pagan Greek equivalent in the Oracle of Delphi.

This oracle or utterer, who was a priestess, would supposedly receive messages from the god Apollo and then pass these obscure messages to the king and others.

In the case before us in Proverbs this son of an oracle, thus making him an oracle by birth, is delivering messages from God Himself.

But notice how this oracle describes himself in the next couple of verses.

Proverbs 30:2-3 ² Surely I am more stupid than any man, And I do not have the understanding of a man. ³ Neither have I learned wisdom, Nor do I have the knowledge of the Holy One.

Why do you suppose he would describe himself in this light, especially since he is taking responsibility in being the conduit, if you will, between God and men?

Essentially, what he is saying is that none of his own wisdom or understanding is coming to bear on those things he is about to share with us.

Though he is the mouthpiece for God he is not the wise one who can be a substitute for the only wise God who is about to speak.

Like John the Baptist, he is taking the attitude, I must decrease and He, that is God, must increase.

And so, this elevates the words he is about to share to a level outside of mere men and places the weight of these words squarely on the shoulders of the creator of all things which is why he ends verse **3** with, "Nor do I have the knowledge of the Holy One."

And then in the following verses he continues to exalt the One who does have all knowledge and power by asking a number of rhetorical questions.

Proverbs 30:4 ⁴ Who has ascended into heaven and descended?

What is intimated in this question?

No mere man has access to God and no mere man can be transcendent in that he can come from heaven to earth and back as seen in that phrase ascended and descended.

And of course this is a direct reference to the Messiah, the logos, the word of God.

^{NAU} **John 3:13** "No one has ascended into heaven, but He who descended from heaven: the Son of Man.

And so, "the collector" is saying that the person he is referring to in the following passages is the same person throughout.

And so, the one who ascends and descends from the throne of God is also the same person we see in this same verse who is referenced by another set of rhetorical question.

Proverbs 30:4 Who has gathered the wind in His fists? Who has wrapped the waters in His garment? Who has established all the ends of the earth? What is His name or His son's name? Surely you know!

Whoever this person is, what is he being identified within these questions?

He's being identified with all power to create and sustain the universe.

And by asking the question, what is His name or His son's name, he is forcing the issue of the nature of who He is and the inferred answer is the same answer God gave Moses.

Exodus 3:13-14 ¹³ Then Moses said to God, "Behold, I am going to the sons of Israel, and I will say to them, 'The God of your fathers has sent me to you.' Now they may say to me, 'What is His name?' What shall I say to them?" ¹⁴ God said to Moses, "***I AM WHO I AM***"; and He said, "Thus you shall say to the sons of Israel, '***I AM*** has sent me to you.'"

And by the way, this is the same person with the same name who addressed the Jews of His day.

John 8:58-59 ⁵⁸ Jesus said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was born, ***I am***." ⁵⁹ Therefore they picked up stones to throw at Him, but Jesus hid Himself and went out of the temple.

Again, we see clearly Jesus Christ right here in our text of Proverbs 30 who is the I Am, the creator of all things in both the heavens and the earth, things visible and invisible who sustains all things by the word of His power.

The oracle, Agur, then continues to magnify the only One who speaks with authority and whose word cannot be questioned.

Proverbs 30:5-6 ⁵ Every word of God is tested; He is a shield to those who take refuge in Him. ⁶ Do not add to His words Or He will reprove you, and you will be proved a liar.

Where else have we seen this last phrase, do not add to His words or He will reprove you and you will be proved a liar?

^{NAU} **Revelation 22:18** I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: if anyone adds to them, God will add to him the plagues which are written in this book;

The rest of chapter 30 emphasizes the importance of keeping all of life in perspective that God is the final judge and the One to whom we answer and Agur utilizes a technique using the numbers 2, 3 and 4 to drive home his point.

And essentially this technique is used to draw special attention to those things that follow.

Proverbs 30:7-8 ⁷ Two things I asked of You, Do not refuse me before I die: ⁸ Keep deception and lies far from me, Give me neither poverty nor riches; Feed me with the food that is my portion,

Now at this point Agur seems to be addressing the God who is all powerful and creator. He has asked the Lord for two things and two things only.

Keep deception and lies from me, and feed me with the food that is my portion.

What is implied here?

Give me what I need to stay close to you in a wicked world that wants my full attention. Do not let me be deceived about who You are and what you've done and are doing, and don't let me be distracted by the issues of the world, be they good or bad, which is what he essentially says in the next verse.

Proverbs 30:9 ⁹ That I not be full and deny *You* and say, "Who is the LORD?" Or that I not be in want and steal, And profane the name of my God.

And so ends chapter 30 and now we come to the end of the Proverbs with a King who is mentioned in the first verse.

Proverbs 31:1 ^{NAU} The words of King Lemuel, the oracle which his mother taught him:

Like the previous names in chapter 30 no other reference can be found for a Lemuel or a king in history by this name. Some suggest that he was the king of Massa, but no one knows with any certainty.

The name itself means devoted to God, or created by God which suggests that this is a message from one who belongs to God. And like Timothy in the N.T. this person was instructed by his mother who was wise as she sought the one true God and Creator.

And, of course, this would be a reference to the importance to instruct our children in the ways of the Lord.

But what is interesting about this Proverb is that the mother of this King gives him wisdom regarding women and relates that to being wise in a world where the things of this world can be compared to a woman who entices.

Proverbs 31:2-3 ² What, O my son? And what, O son of my womb? And what, O son of my vows? ³ Do not give your strength to women, Or your ways to that which destroys kings.

Here there is a parallelism that uses women and that which destroys kings.

This is not meant to denigrate women, it is actually used to show how the nature of man, (men and women), will be drawn away from God to embrace those things that replace God.

We need only go back to the Garden of Eden to see this. It is true that Eve was deceived and Adam in turn does what King Lemuel is warned not to do; give your strength to women.

In other words, Adam chose the beauty and the enticement of an unwise woman to the command of his creator and God.

It's not the woman who is being blamed for all the ills of humanity, but Adam who was the ultimate blame for bringing sin to mankind. Notice what Paul says regarding Adam's wife.

1 Timothy 2:14 ¹⁴ And *it was* not Adam *who* was deceived, but the woman being deceived, fell into transgression.

Well, there you have it, the woman is to blame. But this is precisely the point Paul is not making.

The woman may have been deceived, but it was Adam who made the conscious choice to rebel in his choice to enter into sin without any deception from the serpent.

His choice was the result of elevating his wife to a place of determining what was good and pleasing to the eye, thus giving his strength to the woman.

And this is why Paul would also say... **1 Corinthians 15:22** ²²
For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all will be made alive.

This doesn't discount the choice of Eve to sin because she certainly would be included in Adam since she was taken from Adam, but it was Adam who was chosen by God to represent all of mankind, including his wife who was deceived.

It is from this point that Lemuel takes what he has learned from his mother about women and addresses a woman who is ideal in all her ways as she is seen as an excellent wife.

Let's just read portions of it.

Proverbs 31:10-12 ¹⁰ An excellent wife, who can find? For her worth is far above jewels. ¹¹ The heart of her husband trusts in her, And he will have no lack of gain. ¹² She does him good and not evil All the days of her life.

That's pretty good stuff and it certainly seems to elevate women to a position that is anything but demeaning. It is often charged by critics of Christianity that the church places women in a subservient position as they use passages like women being silent in the church or women being the weaker vessel and so forth.

Here in Proverbs the excellent wife is praised and elevated as she should be.

Proverbs 31:14-17 ¹⁴ She is like merchant ships; She brings her food from afar. ¹⁵ She rises also while it is still night And gives food to her household And portions to her maidens. ¹⁶ She considers a field and buys it; From her earnings she plants a vineyard. ¹⁷ She girds herself with strength And makes her arms strong.

Here she is seen as industrious and a provider for her family in many ways. And Lemuel shows how her mercy extends beyond her family and into her community and she is blessed for this.

There have been many books written on this woman of Proverbs, but again we must be careful not to make the book of Proverbs into a compilation of pithy wise sayings for just everyday life as though this were a self-help book for the masses.

This book is first and foremost a book of the Messiah as we saw clearly at the beginning of chapter 30.

Chapter 31 is God's declaring the role of women and a wife who is to be praised as she seeks the Lord and blesses God in her role as a mother and wife.

But there is a wife here that must not be overlooked as the Lord is giving us a picture of that excellent wife who is faithful.

Any thoughts on who this wife might be?

Revelation 21:9-12 ⁹ Then one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls full of the seven last plagues came and spoke with me, saying, "Come here, I will show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb." ¹⁰ And he carried me away in the Spirit to a great and high mountain, and showed me the holy city, Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, ¹¹ having the glory of God. Her brilliance was like a very costly stone, as a stone of crystal-clear jasper. ¹² It had a great and high wall, with twelve gates, and at the gates twelve angels; and names *were* written on them, which are *the names* of the twelve tribes of the sons of Israel.

This wife who has the glory of God where her brilliance was like a very costly stone is the wife the Holy Spirit is addressing as the one who faithfully serves and loves her husband.

Marriage is a gift to humanity by God Himself as He sets the rules for how that marriage is to work and the woman in Proverbs 31

certainly exemplifies that, but marriage was always meant to demonstrate much more.

Ephesians 5:28-32 ²⁸ So husbands ought also to love their own wives as their own bodies. He who loves his own wife loves himself; ²⁹ for no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ also *does* the church, ³⁰ because we are members of His body. ³¹ FOR THIS REASON A MAN SHALL LEAVE HIS FATHER AND MOTHER AND SHALL BE JOINED TO HIS WIFE, AND THE TWO SHALL BECOME ONE FLESH. ³² This mystery is great; but I am speaking with reference to Christ and the church.

There are a couple of things that Paul is teaching here about marriage and one of those things is that there is a man and woman involved in that relationship, but Paul tells the man that he has an obligation from God to love his wife and to cherish his wife.

But he uses an illustration as to how that wife is to be loved. What is that according to verse 29?

Just as Christ also does the church.

Well, this begs the question, how does Christ love the church?

To answer that we really need to go back to before creation.

Speaking of the destruction of the beast in the book of Revelation John records these words for us in two different places.

Revelation 13:8-9 ⁸ All who dwell on the earth will worship him, *everyone* whose name has not been written from the foundation of the world in the book of life of the Lamb who has been slain. ⁹ If anyone has an ear, let him hear.

Revelation 17:8 ⁸ "The beast that you saw was, and is not, and is about to come up out of the abyss and go to destruction. And those who dwell on the earth, whose name has not been written in the book of life from the foundation of the world, will wonder when they see the beast, that he was and is not and will come.

We know that the bride of the Lamb of God is His church. According to Revelation when was this bride set apart to be wed to the Prince of Peace?

From the foundation of the world, which is another way of saying that when the foundation of the world was laid with the first atom or molecule being called into existence, the wife of the Lamb had already been chosen for the day of the great marriage in the kingdom to come.

^{NAU} **Matthew 25:34** "Then the King will say to those on His right, 'Come, you who are blessed of My Father, *inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.*'"

Ephesians 1:3-4 ³ Blessed *be* the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly *places* in Christ, ⁴ *just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world*, that we would be holy and blameless before Him.

Notice the reason for Him choosing us. That we would be holy and blameless before Him. This is the bride of the Lamb that is described in the book of Revelation.

Revelation 19:7-9 ⁷ "Let us rejoice and be glad and give the glory to Him, for the marriage of the Lamb has come and His bride has made herself ready." ⁸ It was given to her to clothe herself in fine linen, bright *and* clean; for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints. ⁹ Then he said to me, "Write, 'Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb.'" And he said to me, "These are true words of God."

This is the excellent wife of Proverbs whom we have all been called to emulate, in Christ. It is a picture of that perfect relationship between the wife and the husband, the family and the world.

It is that perfect relationship that is found only in the One who came to give us life and the One who was also chosen before the creation of the world to be our Savior.

1 Peter 1:18-21 ¹⁸ knowing that you were not redeemed with perishable things like silver or gold from your futile way of life inherited from your forefathers, ¹⁹ but with precious blood, as of a lamb unblemished and spotless, *the blood* of Christ. ²⁰ For He was foreknown before the foundation of the world, but has appeared in these last times for the sake of you ²¹ who through Him are believers in God, who raised Him from the dead and gave Him glory, so that your faith and hope are in God.

This same Peter addressed the Jews of his day on the day of Pentecost with these words.

Acts 2:22-24 ²² "Men of Israel, listen to these words: Jesus the Nazarene, a man attested to you by God with miracles and wonders and signs which God performed through Him in your midst, just as you yourselves know-- ²³ this *Man*, delivered over by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God, you nailed to a cross by the hands of godless men and put *Him* to death. ²⁴ "But God raised Him up again, putting an end to the agony of death, since it was impossible for Him to be held in its power.

God has always had a plan for you and me but it was always a plan in the Son of God who was chosen to redeem you and me even before we were born, even before the world was even created so that we might spend eternity with Him in a special relationship that is so intimate and close that the only human way of beginning to understand it is to look at the marriage relationship.

We who are His beloved and have been called to love Him above all and our neighbor as ourselves.

Colossians 3:12-17 ¹² So, as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience; ¹³ bearing with one another, and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you. ¹⁴ Beyond all these things *put on* love, which is the perfect bond of unity. ¹⁵ Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body; and be thankful. ¹⁶ Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms *and* hymns *and* spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God. ¹⁷ Whatever you do in word or deed, *do* all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through Him to God the Father.